

The popular book, *Double Act*, by Jacqueline Wilson has been dramatised in four 25-minute episodes to make ideal viewing for Key Stage 2 pupils. The programmes support Author Study and children's writing.

The dramatisation mirrors the original plot, but it is interesting to observe the adaptations necessary to make it successful for television. The use of camera angles and carefully edited shots and sound reflect the original pace and quirky nature of the book. For example, the visual 'rapping' of sequences which are repeated backwards and forwards accentuates the twins' irritating or naughty behaviour. The settings, design, colour and use of scene-setting animation at the beginning of each episode encapsulate the atmosphere created by Nick Sharratt's illustrations in Jacqueline Wilson's books.

Part 1

The story opens in a suburban house. The 'sold' sign outside symbolises the changes that are about to be experienced by its current occupants: the twins Ruby and Garnet, their dad and grandmother.

Using the twins' voices over a cartoon sequence, we hear the girls' life story to date – how their parents Opal and Richard fell in love, had the twins and lived happily together for some years, until, sadly, Opal became ill and died. The twins' grandmother came to live with them to take care of everything whilst their Dad went to work. Then Richard was made redundant, he met Rose, and everyone's life began to change. Rose – portrayed by the twins and their Gran as the predatory archetypal wicked stepmother – supports 'Rich' in his desire to move to the country and open a bookshop.

The first episode portrays the family's transition from town to country. Gran is left behind in sheltered housing and the girls are carried reluctantly from the bustle of city life to the quiet of a country village and a new beginning.

Ruby is the dominant twin – leading, controlling and sometimes undermining the less confident Garnet – but at this stage of the story they are strongly united in their resentment and hostility towards the usurper, Rose. They employ their spooky talent for identical and infuriating behaviour – 'twin-time' – to disrupt life as much as they possibly can in an attempt to oust Rose.

Despite the girls' valiant attempts to sabotage the move, the family arrive at the bookshop and before the end of the episode the twins have managed to make enemies of Blob and his gang.

Activities

- Describe the techniques used to portray the twins' life history and the effect this has on the viewer. How does this compare with how we find out about the girls' past in the book *Double Act*?
- Write a character study of Gran, commenting on her relationship with the twins, Dad and Rose. How might she adapt to her new lifestyle? Use examples from the drama to back up opinions.
- Debate whether or not there is any justification for the twins' behaviour towards their father and Rose.
- Discuss how stepmothers are portrayed in other stories. How do we respond to them? How biased are these portrayals?

Part 2

'The Red Bookshop' opens for business, but to Dad and Rose's disappointment, very few customers actually buy anything. Running a bookshop turns out to be an opportunity to meet some of the rather narrow-minded local residents.

Ruby and Garnet start school and find that Blob and his gang are their fellow classmates. The teacher gives them a warm welcome, in contrast to the increasing hostilities coming from Blob and the gang. The twins intensify their twin behaviour, which strengthens their togetherness and maintains their isolation from others.

During the painting of a mural on the classroom wall, Garnet teams up with a girl called Judy and they paint a beautiful pair of giraffes, whereas Ruby chooses to paint a couple of fleas.

This scene identifies Ruby's jealousy when anyone else tries to get close to Garnet. At this stage, it is apparent how much Ruby tries to exert power over her sister and we see how Rose makes a particular effort to comfort Garnet.

Ruby hatches a plan to get them both away from the village and Rose. She suggests to Garnet that if they are really badly behaved, they'll get expelled from school and they'll have to leave! The next day at school, they make their teacher's life a misery by disrupting the classroom routine, wrecking the class mural and incessantly performing their irritating 'double act'. At her wit's end, Ms Debenham informs their dad and they are in 'double trouble'!

Activities

- Write a letter from Ms Debenham to Mr Barker, describing the twins' behaviour that day. Does she describe both girls in the same way, or has she noticed that it is Ruby who is leading Garnet on?
- Write an entry in Judy's diary about how she feels when Ruby claims back her twin sister saying, 'Push off Judy'.
- At this point in the drama, how do the boys in the class feel about the twins' behaviour? Use hot seating to consider what they might be thinking and saying about them.

Part 3

Ruby notices an advert asking for twin girls to audition for the starring roles in a new TV serial. She seizes on the idea as a way of escaping their current situation. Garnet is not keen on the idea of auditioning or acting, but Ruby is determined. 'Mega excited' at the prospect of becoming movie stars, Ruby tries to persuade her father to take them to the auditions. Dad is quite firm in his refusal, especially when he notices how unenthusiastic poor Garnet is.

Undeterred, Ruby continues to prepare for 'flashy film star' status by finding other ways for them to attend the auditions. Reluctantly, Garnet is forced to sell her great grandmother's doll for much less than it is worth and Ruby steals from Rose's purse to give them enough money for a taxi to the station and train tickets to Birmingham.

Arriving in Birmingham, they eventually find the venue for the auditions and are shocked by the number of twins already lining up. Ruby realizes that many of the girls are from stage school and have specially prepared audition pieces, but Garnet is too busy being sick for them to practice and when the casting director (the real Jacqueline Wilson) calls them on stage, it is Ruby who ostentatiously improvises whilst Garnet cowers behind her.

By this time, Dad has arrived at the theatre, and angrily witnesses Ruby's performance and the humiliation of Garnet, who is unable to speak, let alone act. Back at home, the twins are sent to bed and banned from watching TV, but Rose calls them down to see a news report on the auditions of the new series which is to be set at a boarding school. This gives Ruby the idea for the girls' next escape plan, and together they write a letter to the head teacher of Marnock Heights – a real girls' boarding school!

Activities

- In role as the casting director, write notes that describe your responses to Ruby and Garnet at the audition and their suitability for the parts in the TV series.
- Brainstorm all the emotions that Dad must have had:
 - a) when he discovered that the twins had gone to Birmingham;
 - b) when he sees them at the theatre.

Part 4

Impressed by the twins' letter, the head teacher of Marnock Heights writes back to the girls enclosing a prospectus of the school and explaining that there is one scholarship place if the twins would like to come and sit an entrance exam. The twins are excited and Dad takes them to the school. Ruby is confident that they've both done well, but Garnet is already worried that Ruby alone will get the place and she will be separated from her.

The letter arrives offering Garnet a place at Marnock Heights, not Ruby. Ruby is furious, upset and resentful. The self-effacing Garnet assumes mistaken identity and presumes that Ruby will go.

The letter marks the beginning of a dramatic change in the twins' relationship. Ruby is determined to separate herself from Garnet. She changes her clothes and cuts her long hair. They are no longer identical. Ruby doesn't want Garnet to copy her or even play with her and becomes really hateful. The sensitive Garnet is distressed by her sister's behaviour and as the start of boarding school approaches she becomes increasingly sad and anxious. Rose is increasingly supportive to both girls and Dad, too, works hard to let each of them find their own way.

In the midst of this turmoil, Gran arrives with her gentleman friend and mourns the changes that have occurred to Ruby, the scruffy 'tomboy'.

Garnet settles in happily at Marnock Heights. As the result of another fight with Blob and the gang, Ruby and Blob end up as 'mates'. The story ends happily, with both girls forgiving one another and promising to be best friends no matter where they are.

Activities

- In two columns, list:
 - a) all the devices that Ruby uses to isolate herself from Garnet;
 - b) how Garnet behaves as a result of Ruby's attitude.
- Discuss how Blob is portrayed. What do we know about him from the drama? What do we think we know about him? How do we fill in the bits that the writer hasn't told us?

English for 7–11 year olds



Book Box: Double Act



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